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By-Worley, Stinson E.

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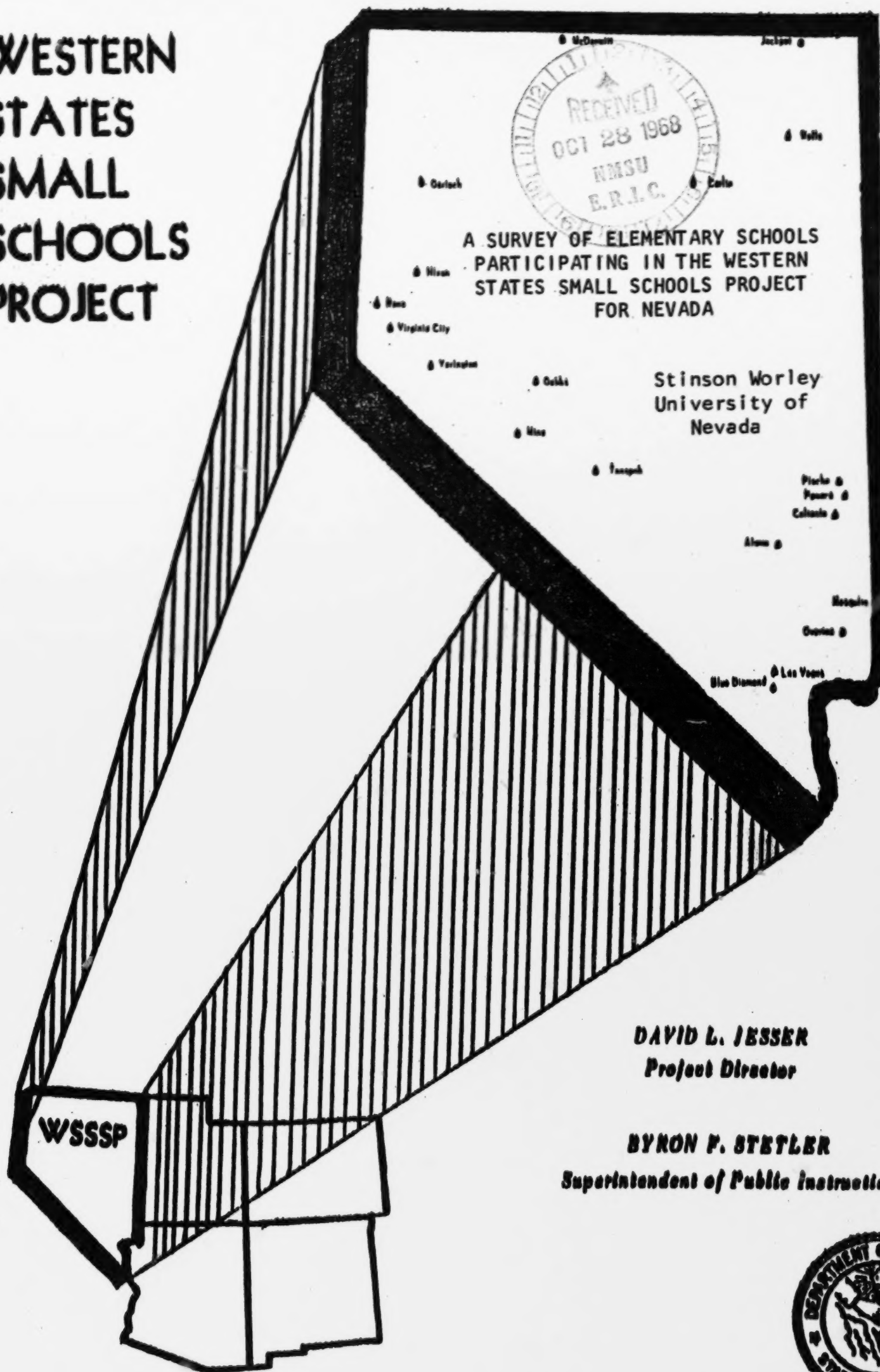
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A survey of a number of small elementary schools in the Nevada Western States Small Schools Project (WSSSP) provides a descriptive review of promising teaching practices and an assessment of additional needs. Promising practices observed include high teacher interest and pupil involvement; creativity; individualized instruction; and use of teaching aids, devices, libraries, and library resources. Strengths mentioned are academic freedom, small numbers of children, an abundant supply of materials, close community interest, and the rural atmosphere. The needs listed include instructional leadership, specific goals and purposes, a compilation of ideas, inter-faculty visitations, and emphasis on student work. It is concluded that these WSSSP schools are not really the drab, run-down places that might be envisioned, but are schools where professional, dedicated people have the material, supplies, and freedom to try new ideas and innovations. (SW)

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WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT



DAVID L. JESSER
Project Director

BYRON F. STETLER
Superintendent of Public Instruction



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**ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS SURVEY
WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT
FOR NEVADA**

**PREPARED BY
STINSON E. WORLEY
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA
RENO, NEVADA**

**FOR
DAVID L. JESSER
DIRECTOR, WSSSP
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CARSON CITY, NEVADA**

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NEVADA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SURVEY
WESTERN STATES SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT

This paper presents a descriptive review of promising teaching practices observed by the writer while visiting a number of the small elementary schools in Nevada. The trip was made with Mr. David L. Jesser, Project Director for the Western States Small Schools Project in Nevada, during the week of November 16 - 20. Observed in this survey were schools representing such varied areas of the state as the Indian School at Nixon; Jackpot, near the Idaho border; Mesquite and Blue Diamond in the southern section, and Mina, on the western edge of the state. A complete list of schools visited is presented in the appendix.

I. PURPOSE OF SURVEY

The purpose of this trip was basically twofold: (1) What promising instructional practices are emerging in the small elementary schools of Nevada? (2) If the W.S.S.S.P. was continued for an additional period of time, what additional needs should the project attempt to meet? The program of the W.S.S.S.P. is now in the early months of its third year. Four elementary schools participated the first year, four additional schools were added last year, and four more this year, bringing the total to twelve. Thus, some schools have had the assistance of the small schools project for only a short time.

Due to the long distances traveled between schools, the visits in schools were by no means uniform. In some instances visits were of several hours duration, while in others, shorter lengths of time were involved. Some visits were during school hours and others in the afternoon and the evening. Thus it must be said that the observations may be incomplete and subjective at times.

II. PROMISING PRACTICES

Some of the most promising practices noted in the small schools of Nevada seem to fall into the following listed categories. Their notation by the writer does not mean that the practice was observed extensively or seemed to be a trend. These practices do appear to have promise for meeting the peculiar needs of young children and small schools.

A. High Interest and Pupil Involvement. Though high interest and pupil involvement are not techniques, they do indicate motivation. Over and over the writer was compelled to comment about the high degree of interest in classwork shown by both the children and the teachers. One could feel the excitement that came from a new idea and from having some materials to implement an idea. Most teachers and children showed a lot of enthusiasm over such things as supplemental reading kits, overhead projectors, new math materials, listening devices, just to mention a few. These tangible items seemed to open new vistas of instructional direction, new ways to interest children, and new means for meeting individual needs. Half of the success of any aid is certainly in the enthusiasm and interest it generates.

It was also noted that most of the new teaching materials involved more student participation. Children were getting into the act through operating tape recorders, controlled readers, head phones, teaching machines, microscopes, film strips, etc. A group of children at Nixon was making pottery out of clay while another group of youngsters was practicing spelling from a teacher-made tape. Instructions for the clay objects were given very clearly by the use of the overhead projector.

The classes were on the move. Teachers apparently have been encouraged to try new devices, and success already seems to be coming through just trying.

B. Creativity. In a few schools one could feel a breath of creativity in the air. Creative art, creative writing, and creative drama plus other avenues of original expression have a way of making a classroom or school come alive. You could sense this from the front office through the classes in the Mesquite School where an art festival is an annual affair. You could sense this from the enthusiasm in the voices of some of the Wells teachers. Other schools are still in the talking stage about creativity, but it was obvious it would come.

Who would imagine that in the auditorium of the small southeastern rural Nevada school of Mesquite one would find the walls lined with beautiful oil paintings of the West? Every year they have an art festival with collections of paintings brought in from all over the country. The best of each festival is purchased to enhance and motivate the boys and girls of Mesquite throughout the school year. Not only was there encouragement for creative art but also for creative drama. The stage was set for a student play. The unusual aspect about this play was the fact that the audience participates by being on stage as well as in the play. An air of freedom and freshness abounds in this school. What a place for a teacher that wants to do something!

Just as creative was some of the writing in the Wells and Mesquite primary grades. The ideas of children were being captured and put on paper. Not only were they learning to read the ideas of others, but they were seeing the worth of their own ideas and the importance of using the right words. It is unfortunate that most teachers are modest about displaying the creative work of their children. The original story of one child on the bulletin board is worth a hundred papers of copy work.

Other original productions of children were noted in the murals found in

some rooms. The most interesting were the large ones covering almost a side of the classroom. Art projects involve the kinesthetic and the tactile so especially needed by boys.

C. Teaching Aids and Devices. As previously mentioned, teaching aids and devices were observed to have the most noticeable affect on the individuals visited. The schools had by far more materials of this type than most of this state's urban schools. Not only were new teaching aids available, but they were being used.

The aid that was the most prized by the teachers was the overhead projector. Usually these projectors were a permanent part of the room equipment and thus of more use to the teacher. Some used the machine for showing concrete objects in the new math; others presented art and science directions with it; while still others developed attractive transparencies for use in countless types of presentations. Most of the transparencies were "homemade" on the new copying machines many schools have. A permanent screen mounting, like the one made by Mr. Talso at Nixon, appeared to be a good idea for teachers using the overhead projector during most of the day.

The listening stations were being built and put into use in several schools, e.g. Pioche, Alamo, and Nixon. Though a lot of tape programing needs to be done, these stations are already assisting in small group instruction and practice sessions. Teachers are finding that making tapes takes time. Help is going to be needed in the near future in developing tapes for maximum teacher and student efficiency.

Another promising aid observed in some schools was the Controlled Reader for visual training and improving reading rate. Several schools have put this machine to best use by arranging for a visual corner where a small group can work with this machine independently. This further diversifies instruction

and frees the teacher for individual help. Also, in relation to the film strip machine are the increasing numbers of filmstrips being purchased. Some schools are building film collections as well as tape collections and establishing central storage areas, sometimes in an accessible place in the library.

A number of arithmetic aids were noticed in most of the schools. Usually these were aids to help children conceptualize and develop meaning with numbers, like the feltboard cut-outs, one hundred charts, counting men, geometric figures, place value charts, and number games. For extra primary practice, the Jackpot primary teacher finds the little NAK Paired Association Trainer helpful. Some schools are purchasing the EDL Math Program for another kind of reinforcement. The SRA Arithmetic Series was observed to be the new program used by most teachers. This series in itself involves the purchase of selected aids.

In individual school situations other varied aids were being used. The Fun With Maps (Nystrom) material was highly thought of at Alamo where they also have the World Book Company's "Cyclo Teacher" and SRA's "Study Skills Library." The microscope with its own built-in light was another help found.

Many other audio-visual aids are probably being used that were not noticed. Also some rooms had to be by-passed due to the scheduling demands. As mentioned at the beginning of this sub-topic, the presence and apparent use of audio-visual aids in the small schools visited seems to be one of the most effective changes taking place. This points to the importance of materials for any job that is to be done. Materials generally dictate the program in which the children work and must be carefully screened in terms of needs.

D. Individualization of Instruction. Some schools are beginning to tailor their programs to the individual needs of children. To do this requires a great deal of concern and effort on the part of teachers. This ultimate goal of instruction is probably the most difficult job in teaching because of the great demands it places on diagnoses, instruction, record-keeping, and evaluation. Many teachers individualize instruction at times and do not realize it, thinking that this type of teaching always involves a one to one teacher-pupil relationship. On the contrary, this is only one phase of this personal instruction and usually a minor part of an average day in this work. Individualized instruction generally means that instruction is personally meaningful on the basis of the child's purpose or need. At times, for example in the area of reading, teaching would be on a one to one basis while, at times, at the other extreme, teaching would be on a teacher-whole class basis, depending upon the individual purposes and needs. Usually instruction of this type involves teacher-small group work. When the common need of a group is met, the group is dissolved and reorganized on the basis of other emerging needs.

Most of the individualized teaching that was observed was accomplished through the use of special materials and devices. The Science Research Associates Reading Laboratories are a step in this direction. Here an attempt is made to put at the fingertips of the teacher reading material with a range of eight or nine years in vocabulary difficulty. By being a self-teaching device, the teacher is freed to work where needed. Many of the small school teachers were using these kits and individualizing instruction. The use of tapes at listening stations, EDL Controlled Readers with small groups, and libraries for extensive free reading can all

make for meeting the individual needs of children.

A few people have moved even beyond the reading kits and devices in individualizing reading instruction, e.g. in some Wells primary rooms. This doesn't mean necessarily that the basal textbook is put aside. It does mean that the basal is only a beginning that children are given the opportunity through trade books to see that reading is not only something to know but something that is a vital part of meeting one's personal needs. In this way the reading teacher teaches children not only to read but teaches children that do read.

A vital part of individualizing instruction in reading is a library or central storage. It was gratifying to see a marked effort under way to provide extensive reading materials for children. More will be reported about libraries later in this report.

A special remedial reading teacher has been added to the Mesquite staff. Within her room are kept the special reading aids provided by the district. This person can provide a vital service to children and teachers. A special teacher of this type, who gives children with extreme reading difficulties a second chance, does not remove the need for individualizing reading with other children. Personalizing reading instruction for these special cases should facilitate the individualizing of reading for the other children. So often when special teachers are employed, regular teachers begin to feel less responsible for reading instruction and tend to move toward more "groupized" teaching. From talking with the Mesquite teachers, I feel that reading has become more individualized across the board.

E. Libraries and Library Resources. Most people might labor under the delusion, as did the writer, that small schools spell equally small libraries and library resources. Because of some aggressive administrators and teachers,

this is not the case in most of the small schools visited. Some examples of bright and shining new libraries that were seen are at Carlin, Mesquite, and Blue Diamond. Children from grades K through 12 use the Carlin and Mesquite libraries. This is an excellent arrangement, providing a higher reading ceiling for some elementary youngsters and a lower base for some high school youth. Nothing can take the place of a library and a librarian for a school. Research indicates that reading scores go up when a school has a library and librarian. For the small hamlet the school library can be an important community center too.

Without a library, it is difficult, to say the least, to have an individualized reading program or research centered activities. With a library many children can almost provide their own education without us. Hats off to Blue Diamond where a library has been developed in the teachers' lounge. Here is a school with three teachers and some two thousand bright new trade books. Of course, it takes more than books to make a reading program but this provision is the starting place. It has been reported that workbooks are the most expensive bound print one can buy.

The libraries observed were almost being turned into resource centers where tapes, film strips, etc. are also available. The key factor in a library is the extensiveness and availability of the collection. Most of the schools visited have access to a library somewhere or at least have available a book delivery service. However, when library resources are not within the plant or on the same campus, they tend not to be used. In these cases the textbook becomes more and more important. It has been said that students should begin with the textbook but not end with it.

III. SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES IN SMALL SCHOOLS.

As schools were visited throughout the state of Nevada, it became

apparent that the people working in these small schools have several distinct opportunities in working with children. One could also conjure a few possible disadvantages due to the remoteness of some communities. But basically, as far as instruction is concerned, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses.

A. Freedom. Most of the teachers observed seemed to have a great amount of academic freedom in teaching. With few exceptions, teachers were working in a manner in which they seemed personally to believe. There apparently is a minimum of formal structure in scheduling, programs, and procedures to which staff members feel tied. Not only is there freedom to do, but perhaps freedom from being "bothered". What an advantage for the person who desires to try out new ideas for getting greater results.

B. Small Numbers of Children. In a number of cases small school classes have only twelve or fourteen children. This provides for almost a family situation where interaction can take place with less control. It is almost impossible to keep from individualizing instruction in a class like this. Of course, in most situations with small numbers, several grade lines are represented. But this is usually the case in even a one-grade class. Where several grades are combined in one room, there is added opportunity for every child to find his place regardless of chronological age.

C. Materials. The small schools appeared to have an abundant supply of the basic textbooks as well as workbooks. Over and above this, rooms have more extra aids and devices than noted in most of the large urban districts. Principals, on the whole, have done an excellent job of meeting the teacher's instructional materials needs.

D. Community Interest. Most small schools serve as a community center. By sharing resources and facilities, a close community interest and spirit exists.

E. Rural Atmosphere. The children of the small schools have the opportunity of living almost in a natural history environment. Science in a nature laboratory like this should be more meaningful and personally involving.

IV. ADDITIONAL NEEDS.

As one observes this sampling of Nevada's small schools, it becomes apparent that each elementary unit cannot be placed under the general classification "small school" as though this tells a story. These small schools do not fit a stereotype pattern of instruction, teachers, facilities, communities, or any other factor. Like the children we teach, each school has a distinct personality all its own made up of strengths and weaknesses, ideas and doubts. So the needs of these schools, like all schools, are quite varied. Additional assistance should probably be within the following list:

A. Instructional Leadership. Without exception the administrators of the schools visited want the best possible instruction for the children of their districts. The abundance of new teaching aids and devices noted in each classroom is a testimony of administrative finesse and concern. But aids by themselves will not accomplish the task. Nothing can take the place of a well-trained and imaginative teacher bent on doing the most creative job she knows how. Teachers on the whole, however, do not function at this level without real instructional leadership. Teaching children in an individualized and creative manner takes mental perceptiveness and physical drive as well as taking some chances. Behind every faculty working at this level is an instructional leader who is encouraging new techniques and supporting those who try. The answer for exploring a new idea in this situation is, "Why not" rather than "Why?" Like the children in our classrooms,

teachers need a backlog of supportive strength from a principal who is also a student of instruction.

B. Goals and Purposes. Instructional leaders should constantly point up to staff members the accepted goals and purposes of the school. When these are understood, there can be little doubt of the types of teaching aids and devices needed and not needed and the specific function each is to serve. Otherwise, teachers can become technicians or machine operators, unaware of the intrinsic nature of the task and unquestioning of the direction they are going. Modern teachers attempting to individualize instruction move more toward the techniques of diagnosis and individual programing. Before any teaching aid is purchased, it seems these questions should be asked: (1) What specific instructional need do I have? (2) In what specific way will this device meet this need? Physicians prescribe different types of medicine for different physical needs, and in like manner teachers must prescribe selected instructional aids for different educational needs.

C. Compendium of Ideas. Certain audio-visual aids that have been purchased for classrooms (overhead projectors, listening stations and tape recorders) hold promise for many instructional areas. Due to the newness of these devices, most teachers are aware of only a few uses. It seems that a compilation of teacher ideas for using the equipment might greatly expand the utility and effectiveness of these aids.

D. Inter-Faculty Visitations. The W.S.S.S.P. is now in its third year. Ideas and techniques that have emerged in schools during this time could be of immeasurable help to teacher colleagues of other districts. Area colloquy might be arranged in future years for inter-faculty visitation and sharing of ideas.

E. Emphasis on Student Work. The American classroom will soon be characterized by its number of teaching machines, multi-level materials and kits, and electronic listening and scanning devices. The charge should continually be made to teachers that these helps not be permitted to gradually squeeze out the compositions and original projects of children. For individual work of this kind is always the true test and proof of teaching.

V. CONCLUSION

Changes are taking place in the Nevada Small Schools. Enthusiasm is high among both teachers and children and there exists a general feeling of forward movement. To be sure, some of this must be credited to the efforts of the visiting specialists that have worked with these teachers in past summers. New multi-level instructional materials and audio-visual aids added recently to many classrooms have also contributed an air of freshness and a challenge to classes. Libraries are being created and large numbers of books are being purchased in some schools. Some teachers are initiating individualized instructional programs in both reading and writing, while others are in the planning stage.

Some programs and ideas are yet to be implemented in the small schools. A maximum utilization and coordination of materials now needs to be developed. Teachers could profit from an exchange of ideas and methods with other small school teachers. Time now needs to be given to establishing firmly the successful techniques that have been tried in the various schools. It would be a shame for all of the initial ideas and plans, new techniques and materials to reach this point of development and not be pushed to fruition.

Visiting the small schools of Nevada corrected several false impressions of the observer. Students in training to be teachers could have many of their distorted ideas of small schools corrected by this type of visit. Rural schools are not drab, run down places to teach. The teachers in these buildings on the whole have more materials and supplies than their urban school colleagues. The teachers themselves are for the most part highly professional and dedicated people. And, it was also noted, that teachers seem to have more freedom to try new ideas and innovations for greater instructional results.

APPENDIX
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SURVEY ITINERARY

COUNTY

Clark

Elko

Lincoln

Mineral

Washoe

TOWN

Blue Diamond

Mesquite

Carlin

Jackpot

Wells

Alamo

Caliente

Panaca

Pioche

Mina

Nixon